At The Theatres

THE BELASCO.

"Drifting."

There was one of the most brilliant audiences of the season last night at the Belasco Theater, an audience of the sort that turns out to grand opera, for it was so special an occasion that the first balcony was converted into a tier of boxes where fashionable Washington was accommodated with seats.

The occasion was the first performance in Washington—practically the first real performance, though the premiere was in New Haven—of a comedy in three acts called "Drifting," the work of Mr. Preston Gibson, a young gentleman known in society, to whom a majority of the fashionable audience was very friendly and cordial, and who rewarded the author's efforts with liberal appreciation and applause. At the end of the second act, after the players had been called upon to make their bows, the applause continued until Mr. Gibson appeared on the stage and bowed his acknowledgments with a smile.

Much was expected of this three-act comedy by Mr. Gibson, for it is the latest work of a man who has written several things for the stage. Of these, it is not necessary to speak, perhaps, except to say that they might have been expected to teach their author some of the principles of dramatic technique of which "Drifting" betrays so remarkable a paucity.

Many people will be interested in the story of "Drifting." Its scenes are all laid in the villa of Henry Harrison, at Newport, R. I. Hither Mr. Harrison, a broker of sorts and some money, has brought his young wife. Also, as soon as the play opens, he brings on a visit his friend, William Worthington, a rich cad, whose reputation among women, in spite of his reputed wealth, is such that it is highly improbable that he could find lodgment in any gentleman's house. But already ensconced in Mr. Harrison's house is Althea Anderson, who is in love with Harrison and who is frank enough to confess in the hearing of the audience that she has had a disgraceful liaison with Worthington. It appears that Althea Anderson is sadly in debt, and her money lender is bothering her. In fact, he calls upon her at the Newport villa, securing his entree in spite of the servants, and he threatens to expose her. But Althea manages to placate him—nay, she turns the trick that the old actor of Richard Steele's day, Billy Barry, turned on the bailiffs who came to arrest him for debt, she borrows more money from him, this time on the security—which seems good enough to this money lender—that she will bring about a divorce between Harrison and his bride, and will marry Harrison and his money herself.

The next act jumps from July to October, in which time Hortense Harrison—they all call her "Tensy" in the play—has learned to smoke, to drink, to gamble, and to flirt; at least if it can be called flirting to sit on the veranda with a man who is making love to you until 5 o'clock in the morning. That night "Tensy" has lost $1,100 at roulette; her account is overdrawn, and she is afraid to ask her husband for more, so Bill Worthington offers her a check for $2,000, which, without too much demur, she accepts. Then Bill, when he has pressed the check into her hand, wants to kiss her, and just then Mr. Harrison comes in, finds all about the check, and leaves her.

In the third act Althea persuades "Tensy" that there is nothing left for her to do but to go off to Europe with Worthington while Harrison gets his divorce. Mrs. Harrison thinks that would be best, too, and so Bill Worthington comes over in his motor to take her away. But as they are carrying a suit case out together the husband comes in. He explains that he has been walking without his hat, and that the salt spray on his forehead has cleared his brain; and so he stops the eloping couple, makes love to his wife all over again, forgets the check and the kiss and Bill Worthington, and the play ends with husband and wife in each other's arms, to be as happy as the previous circumstances with which the dramatist has environed them would allow them to be.

Of course, the first thing that strikes you in such a story is its utter and absurd unreality. These people of Mr. Gibson's are not people—they are creatures out of a society novel. Why, even Mr. Gibson himself has recognized this, else he would not abuse the credulity of his audience by his "apt alliteration's artful aid" in naming his marionettes. Glance down the list of his characters:

Thomas Thornton,
Althea Anderson,
Stanley Symington,
Hortense Harrison,
Henry Harrison,
William Worthington,
Sidney Skinner,
Isabel Iethot Irvington,
Dorothy Dickinson,
John Jerome,
Edward Ellsworth,
Victorine Vignaud.

Every one of them double-initialed, as if such a coincidence as that were any more possible than some of the extraordinary things that happen in the drama.

Here and there throughout the play there are moments of humor, but this is because one could hardly try a hundred times to hit a mark and not come near it once in a while. The author, Mr. Gibson, is strong on epigram. He evidently believes, with Disraeli and Oscar Wilde, that society people are known by the epigrams they make, and so, without rhyme or reason, through the dialogue of this play are scattered these supposed-to-be epigrammatic witticisms. The wit in most of them consists in antithesis, as if the author believed that a sentence were epigrammatic simply because it was antithetical. It is the mistake that other authors, dramatic and otherwise, have fallen into.

As to dramatic technique, "Drifting" has nothing that faintly resembles it. There is hardly a piece of action in the play that may not be criticised adversely from plain, common sense grounds. Into this exclusive Newport villa, for instance, a money lender comes and goes without let. There is a conversation over the 'phone in the first act, Althea trying to fool the money lender by a false conversation with Mr. Harrison on the other end. It is so obvious and puerile that it would not deceive a child, let alone a man who was hustling to get back $9,000 of money loaned on rotten security. We are asked to believe that just because Mrs. Harrison's maid had gone out she cannot find any clothes for herself, but has to come down in the afternoon clad in a beribboned petticoat and a peignoir. In this same first act it is suggested by Althea that "Tensy" ought to give a party, and lo, in twenty minutes, before the act is ended, here is the party all gathered in evening regalia, the dinner is set on the porch, and a company of negroes occupies the stage, singing "coon" songs, and dancing, supposedly a typical Newport way of entertaining dinner guests.

But to catalogue the arrant absurdities in the way of violation of all the unities that should control a drama—even a comedy—would grow tiresome. One could mention many more if it were necessary to support the ipse dixit of the observer that the play has no technique.

And in characterization the play is equally weak. We who write this have not the honor of being an intimate of Newport society, but we are quite sure that the subject of having children or not having them is not a usual topic in the living halls of Newport villas. Such conversation is dragged in—for no apparent reason—three or four times in the course of this play. We have pointed out some of the improbabilities in the character of the money lender who is so easily cozened out of his money,—there are others. The character of William Worthington is not even consistent. If he were such a lady-killer as he and his friends—all except Harrison—make him out to be, his escapades have not taught him much, for who but an arrant idiot who grab a married woman and kiss her in her own living hall with a lot of people coming in and going out? This character of Mr. Gibson's meant to be so knowing proves by his actions to be a rank amateur.

Even the character of Tensy is absurdly drawn and all out of line, to use the phrases of another branch of art. Here is a woman after three months of Newport fast life and gambling; a woman who has exceeded her allowance by several thousands and who has had a bank account for months, made to say by the author:

"There is my check for $1,100. I know it is all right, for I have three checks left in my check book.

Such stupidity is not only foreign to the character of a girl who has been through such training, but it impresses you with the lack of thought of an author who should so impound a joke that has done duty in the comic almanacs these many years.

The acting is much better than the play—much too good, in fact, to be wasted on such a vehicle. Mr. Walter Hale, always a conscientious player, really manages to put some life into the character of Harrison; that is, until the absurd last act of reconciliation and impossible "happy ending," when even his ability cannot galvanize the thing into life. Janet Sothern, as Althea Anderson, plays the part of the villainess in quite the approved style, and Frank Goldsmith, as Bill Worthington, did some good acting. But the one character that was made to stand out was that of Hortense Harrison, played by Miss Edith Luckett, a Washington girl. She has improved wonderfully since she was last seen in Washington; she has gained force, self-possession, sureness of touch, and in this part she displays those qualities that made Frances Starr famous in "The Easiest Way." Given a real chance some day, Miss Luckett will be heard from. The other parts in the play are all minor, and make not much difference, anyway.

To think that "Drifting" has any chance of success on the American stage is to think less generously of American audiences and their intelligence than we would willingly do. Nor would it be just to let this performance of "Drifting" pass without a reference to certain passages of vulgarity and coarseness that should be enough to condemn a play tinctured with cleverness, which this play is not. Aiming to be "smart," it is dull and impossible; attempting to draw characters, it present manikins; giving forth what are meant to be epigrams, they are found to be meaningless witticisms. "Drifting," which might have been supposed to point a moral and teach a tale, does neither; it points to several immorals and it recites an improbable fairy tale.

The play received some applause last night, but it was applause muffled by long, white kid gloves. It was the applause of friends—not admirers—and friends never carried any supposed work of art to any sort of success.

HECTOR FULLER.

Scene from "Drifting," at the Belasco Theater last night.

THE COLUMBIA.

"Rejuvenation of Aunt Mary."

"God intended us all to be happy, only some of us don't know how to set about it."

Thus spoke May Robson—pardon, Aunt Mary—at the close of the performance of "The Rejuvenation of Aunt Mary," which opened its third return engagement at the Columbia last evening, but it appeared that the remark was entirely superfluous, for the entire audience had spent the evening being made happy by Miss Robson and her excellent company, whom the programme said were fresh from a "distinguished success at Terry's Theater, London."

Be that as it may, it is almost certain that the success of "The Rejuvenation of Aunt Mary" has never been more "distinguished" than on the occasion of its visit to this city, and last night was no exception to the rule, for the large audience laughed just as heartily and applauded just as vigorously as if this had been the first visit of Anne Warner's comedy to this city.

Indeed, it would appear that this piece, like others of its stamp, will never grow old. It has its defects, of course, but all realization of them is lost in the enjoyment one gets from the lines, the action, the business, and the acting. It has for its theme that ever new, though world-old, story of mother love and devotion to the child, which in this instance, it is true, does not belong to Aunt Mary, but who she claims through the right of upbringing, of education, and of watchfulness, the boy whom she sees safely through all his childish ailments, only to find that she has more work to do when he comes to man's estate—for he gets into troubles with cabmen, cooks, and felines of both the biped and quadruped varieties. But through it all she watches him tenderly, and at last claims him as her boy—and gains a daughter thereby.

There is certainly no use to give the plot of this piece—as well retell the story of "The Old Homestead," or "Way Down East" or Ben Hur;" and almost as surely there remains little or nothing to be said of Miss May Robson's delineation of the character of Aunt Mary.

Suffice it to say that she does not act Aunt Mary—she is Aunt Mary—and long before the fall of the curtain every one in the audience loves her with that same love which she begets in Jack and her "other boys." Simple and sweet, an old-fashioned print suddenly come to life, tender hearted and true, childless and yet a mother—Miss Robson makes of the character of Aunt Mary one long to be remembered and loved by those who have had the good fortune to witness her characterization.

Second only to the work done by the star is the acting of Nina Saville, who still has the role of Lucinda, Aunt Mary's maid. Miss Saville has developed into a splendid character actress, and if the rumor of a company of her own next season comes true, it is only to be hoped that she will be provided with a suitable and adequate part.

Others of the company who helped to make the evening enjoyable were Faye Cusick, as Betty (it was noticed that her hair shows no signs of the bad scorching it received at a benefit performance during her last visit here); Jack Storey, as Jack, Aunt Mary's nephew; Paul Decker, Arthur Deering, and John McMahon, as Jack's chums, and Lotta Blake in a character bit.

If you want to find out the real "way to set about it," go and spend an evening with Aunt Mary—she'll show you how.

THE NEW NATIONAL.

"The House Next Door."

At the New National Theater last night Mr. J. E. Dodson opened his second engagement in "The House Next Door," the comedy adapted from the German by J. Hartley Manners, and both play and star must receive again the favorable verdict rendered before. The former, on account of its exceedingly interesting exposition of a vexing question, and the latter for his remarkable characterization of the chief figure in the drama.

The play is based on race prejudice, as existing between Jew and Gentile. On the one side is arrayed an English aristocrat and his family, while on the other is found a Jew who has risen to affluence from nothing and his progeny. The older representatives of the two sides just about represent the situation as it has been supposed to exist for centuries.

The Gentile is unalterably opposed to any affiliation whatever, and the Jew is disposed to intermix to a great extent, but balks at intermarriage, and that is just where the crux of the matter lay, in the roles of the servants in the two families.

The discussion is interesting, the interpretations artistic, and the denouement pleasing, so that the singularly effective characterization of the star is not the only feature of the production. It is satisfactory as a whole, and the audience of last evening unequivocally renewed the appreciation accorded upon its former presentation.

CHASE'S.

Polite Vaudeville.

Another excellent bill, full of fun, at Chase's this week. Here, once again, vaudeville has drawn pretty heavily on the legitimate, and the headliner of the bill, both by right of his act and by virtue of his reputation, is Maclyn Arbuckle, late star of "The County Chairman," who appears in a cleverly written act by Robert H. Davis, entitled "The Welcher." Mr. Arbuckle assumes the part of a Texas gambler who has just won a fortune on the races. He has received a letter from a sister, whom for years he has lost sight of, saying that she is sending her daughter to call upon him. In honor of the event, the gambler has prepared a lavish banquet, with the latest wines and good things to eat, and, to top it off, he engages an English butler "to do the thing up swell." But when the visitor appears it turns out that she is a forlorn, little, half-starved, thinly clad child, who tells her "Uncle Dan"—for such, indeed, he is—that since father died mother has been ill, and that they are living in Cherry street, in "poverty row." There is a lot of humor in the scene, but underneath it is a note of true pathos, very well done. In the end, of course, Dan takes the child in his arms to carry her home. It is plain there is no more poverty or suffering for Dan's sister or her children. The act is very well written and admirably acted.

Another feature on the bill that greatly pleased the big audience yesterday was Trovato, a violinist, who plays with much skill, but whose specialty is eccentricity after the fashion of Creatore. His selections embrace a wide range of music, from the classical to ragtime, and though his programme was long, he was encored so heartily that it was plain the audience wanted more.

The performance starts with a clever acrobatic and dancing number, "The Hotel Turn Over," a lively and bright act. Gladys Clark and Henry Bergman do a singing and dancing act that is unusually graceful and humorous. Mr. Clifford Walker, an English entertainer, does a very high-class and pleasing act of recitations at, and without, the piano, an act that is a little delicate and fine for vaudeville, but which is most heartily received. Richard is billed with a question-mark (?). He is a female impersonator—of the worst type. A really good act is Berzac's Comedy Circus, a feature of which are trick donkeys and ponies. The ponies are able to run on a revolving wheel that is too much for two-legged animals, and the mules are there for any one who cares to try to ride them. Several tried, but many fell. A good motion picture of the "Actor's Fund Fair" concludes a bully-good bill.

THE ACADEMY.

"The House With the Green Shutters."

The hidden life of the underworld has that same curious fascination for the majority of worthy and upright citizens that the closed door exerted over the wives of Bluebeard. There is an irresistable desire to penetrate into the forbidden domain—and so dramatists provide the "criminal play" as a key with which the timorous may enter and take a peep.

In "The House with the Green Shutters" one is given a full look with money refunded if not satisfactory. Through scenes echo the shrieks of the choking heroine, the crack of pistols, and the jangle of handcuffs or skeleton keys. Clockwork guns, sliding panels, and knockout drops are mere incidents in the daily lives of Alice Craven and her little brother she has sworn to protect. For Alice is heir to an uncle's fortune which Jannett Boynton desires for her own. So the lady adventuress forms a partnership with Hungry Joe, a post-graduate crook, and thereafter excitement reigns until 10:45.

The things that happen to those two children and their protector, a handsome locksmith, are enough to turn the hair of any normal person, but in the end love doesn't laugh at the locksmith—that would be quite against the rules. The necessary relief for strained nerves is furnished by two tramps, who provide plenty of comedy of the slap-stick variety, often verging on rough-and-tumble burlesque. In mounting, the funds have chiefly been expended on gowns for the villainness and gunpowder for the entire cast.

Evelyn Faber is the persecuted Alice; Rene Grau, the little brother, and Lynda Earle the scheming woman; Ralph Macdonald and Arthur Devoe have the principal male roles, which are as conventional as the entire play.

Oh! you dear!

One Christmas Gift to her must be a box of Huyler's

CANDIES OF RARE QUALITY

Cor. F and 12th Streets.

THE CASINO.

Vaudeville.

Capacity houses greeted the bill presented at the Casino Theater yesterday. Of the several unusual acts the chief attraction was undoubtedly that billed as "The Balloon Girl," which, though sensational in character, was most refined and enjoyable.

The musical Macks, with a handsome stage equipment of musical instruments, which included about every instrument from a violin to a bass horn, and numerous oddly contrived pieces from which the musicians evolved harmony; the Tod Nards, with acrobatic feats; El Gordo, in magician's tricks which provoked much laughter; Myers and Tomsel, with clever shadow dancing; Ash and Carr, dancers, and the usual motion picture plays completed the bill.

THE GAYETY.

Burlesque.

There is no question that the "Rollicking Girls," at the Gayety this week, is properly named, as the fair sex is prominent in all parts played in last night's show. The show is devoid of all suggestiveness and is bright and sprightly in songs and dances.

Morva Williams, as the female drummer, is a young lady whose type is seldom seen in a burlesque house. She plays her part and sings her songs in a manner that would do justice to any first-class company. Loretta Moore is an extremely dainty young miss, who took the house by storm in her first number, entitled "Sleepyhead." Audrey Lang, as an actress, had a very pleasing voice, and was seen at her best in "Oh, Mister Moon." Jimmy Connors did very well in his parodies, and Russell and Robinson, as the Fright brothers, gathered in a few laughs.

The performance is a musical comedy, divided in two acts, the first being in a department store, and the second on a roof garden. As stated before, this show is a typical "Girlie" show, and the audience demonstrated by prolonged applause that this is the kind of show that takes at the Ninth street house.

THE NEW LYCEUM.

Burlesque.

The Merry Maidens, at the New Lyceum this week, have one of the best shows seen here in burlesque this year. The incidental music is original and only such popular songs as have not been heard in this city are sung by the large company. Sam Rice heads the list of funmakers, and that in itself is a synonym for fun. The opening burletta, "Furnished Rooms," serves to introduce the entire strength of the company. Mr. Rice's associate comedians are in keeping with the high standard he himself set, and the chorus and principal women are above the average burlesque actresses. The chorus is especially good. The closing burlesque is entitled "All Aboard," and several entertaining specialties are introduced by the company.

THE MAJESTIC.

An entertaining show was presented at the Majestic Theater yesterday to a large audience. The four feature acts include the Five Musical Lovelands, high-class musical act; the Three Clares, comedy acrobats; Lem Welch, Hebrew and dialect impersonations, and Marion Kay, singing and talking comedienne. The majestograph concluded the performance.

THE COSMOS.

Robert McDonald and company, in "A Friend in Need," have a comedy drama that pleased two appreciative audiences yesterday.

Woodford's midget animal circus made a big hit with the little ones and their friends, while Bolduc and Roy present a very acceptable musical act.

Springer and Church, in a new farce, "Who Is It?" have a laughing hit, and Frankie Farrell, a singer; Lilly Langdon, an engaging little comedienne, completed a bill that is one of the strongest seen here this year.

The entire bill will be changed Thursday, with the exception of the "feature," which will be retained for the entire week.

THE PLAZA.

To-day at the Plaza a first-time shown picture, "A Tangled Masquerade," is the feature. Another interesting picture that will be pleasing to all is "Rachel." Messrs. Wallace and Harkins will continue in special song offerings all week.

THE AVENUE GRAND.

Sam Thornberg and company, appearing in a comedy playlet, captured the honors of the programme at the Avenue Grand Theater last night. The house was crowded long before the curtain rose, and the large crowd was generous in its expressions of approval of the different offerings. Dale and Dale, a clever pair of vocalists, won encores. Dunbar's goat circus excited amusement. The animals perform many seemingly impossible tricks. Boyd and Lorentz demonstrated their excellence as singers and dancers. The motion pictures depicted several humorous and dramatic subjects. The Avenue Grand Theater now has afternoon performances each day at 3 o'clock.

THE ALHAMBRA.

This is to be a big week for all at the Alhambra. Manager Arey has something new every day to please every one and especially the children will be taken care of.

THE ARCADE.

The first of the novelty races that have been announced as a special card in the skating auditorium at the Arcade, Fourteenth street and Park road northwest, will take place this evening. One event is an obstacle race, in which a large field of entrants will compete for prizes offered by the management. The race will start promptly at 9:30 o'clock, and at its completion skaters will again have the right of way on the floor.

To-morrow evening the first weekly session of the ballroom will be held.

GENERAL STRIKE FEARED AT CANAL

Commission Troubled Over Labor Situation.

There is a serious situation facing the government officials in the Panama Canal Zone. According to private advices received here yesterday from the Isthmus of Panama, it is not an improbability that a general strike may result.

The trouble has arisen from a demand for more pay. The canal employes more than a year ago made the demand to the local officials on the zone. The demand got no further. They then appealed to the War Department, and after consideration, Mr. Dickinson, the Secretary of War, decided to give the hourly men, so called from being employed by the hour, a short annual leave, but denied an increase in pay.

The men then appealed to President Taft. The President left the matter for attention until his recent trip, when he could look into the matter at close range.

Late advices indicate that the ultimate recommendation of the President will be for four weeks' yearly leave with pay, with a proviso that the leave may be deferred one year, to allow six weeks at one time. Although stated that such is not the official promulgation of the President's order, it is understood to be authoritative.

The majority of the trouble now being experienced is with the boilermakers in the Gorgona shops, only 11 out of 122 first-class men being at work, according to late cable dispatches. Men to take their places are being recruited in different sections of the country.

That there is uneasiness over the situation at the offices of the canal commission here is also shown by the efforts being made to get workmen to take the places of those who have resigned. They have notified agents in the Dominion of Canada and in Europe to do all they can, and advertise the fact extensively that employes, at high wages, are needed on the canal.

When asked if the importation of alien labor to the Canal Zone would in violation of the alien labor law, the authorities here emphatically denied it, saying that the zone is not American territory.

Austrian Cabinet Resigns.

Vienna, Dec. 12.—The government has resigned in consequence of the defection of the Poles, which destroyed the government majority. The Polish party insisted that the ship canals between the Danube and Oder, the construction of which was promised nine years ago, should be built, while the government declared that the work was impossible in the present condition of the finances as the cost would be huge.

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CITY HIGH UP IN WINTER BUILDING

Only Twelve Others Surpass It Last Month.

New building in Washington for the month of November was only 3.5 per cent less than that of November, 1909, and 30.4 per cent greater than that of October, 1910. In a table showing building operations in eighty-five cities in the country, there were thirty-two cities showing an increase and fifty-three a decrease from November, of last year. The expenditures in Washington for new building last month, according to the report issued by Bradstreet's, was $818,615. This was exceeded in amount by only twelve other cities in the United States.

The total amount spent for building in the eighty-five cities reported on for the eleven months of the year was $753,513,147, which was a decrease of 5.1 per cent from that of the corresponding month of last year.

BRIDGE OVER THE RIO GRANDE

Takes the Place of the Brownsville-Matamoras Ferry.

Austin, Tex., Dec. 12.—The international bridge across the Rio Grande, connecting Brownsville and Matamoras, Mexico, was opened to vehicle and foot-passenger traffic to-day. Its opening marks the end of the primitive ferry which James Stillman, of the City National Bank of New York, has operated across the river between the two places for forty years.

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